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Statement submitted by ACT Alliance — Action by Churches Together, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches and Lutheran World Federation, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

As networks of churches and Christian faith-based organisations working for decades in humanitarian response and human rights-based development in over 130 countries, we call for an end to gender inequality and injustice, perpetuated in part by lack of inclusive social protection. We welcome the Commission's acknowledgment that the specific challenges women and girls face while living without access to comprehensive social protection systems must be addressed in order to obtain gender justice for all. These challenges must be particularly addressed in line with the international human rights framework, the ILO recommendation 202 on Social Protection Floors and Agenda 2030 to ensure that 'no one is left behind'.

As Christian faith-based organisations, we are called to work for the common good and just societies, which includes the human right to basic provisions essential for life, and recognise that social protection and the fair sharing of resources are necessary for this. In accordance with the Sigtuna Statement on Theology, Tax and Social Protection (2017), produced by members in our collective network, we understand social protection as every person's human right to social security over the life cycle, provided by a system that includes for instance child grants, parental leave, unemployment benefits and old-age pensions, as well as access to affordable and high quality social services, such as education, healthcare, child, elderly and other social care and protection against gender based violence. We also note that women and girls, especially during childhood and old age, are the most deeply affected by the lack of access to social protection systems. Their over-representation in the care economy, and as the most vulnerable segment of the informal sector, often bar them from benefiting from systems that are linked to the formal labour market. We affirm publicly funded social protection as a moral imperative and as a human right for all, and particularly for those who have been rendered invisible by the current economic and development realities.

Lack of Social Protection in the Informal Sector and Care Economy

The informal sector is composed of two billion workers, of which women constitute 740 million. This sector fails to provide women with labour regulations or social protection benefits like pension, health insurance, or paid parental and/or sick leave. Women in the informal sector also often work for lower wages and in unsafe conditions, with the risk of physical, mental, and sometimes sexual abuse. According to UN-Women's Progress Report, fewer women than men receive pensions globally (due to their involvement in the informal sector) which results in more women than men living in poverty.

Faith-based actors acknowledge and emphasise that sustainable social protection systems must be financed by the states through taxation or other public revenues, even while recognising immediate needs for social protection where state responsibility is lacking. In settings where these systems are particularly deficient, churches and faith-based organisations have been supplementing governmental insufficiencies. For example, the Lutheran World Federation in Mauritania links women with customised health insurance schemes, which allow them to access otherwise unavailable medical services.

Women and girls are the most predominant actors in the care economy. Due to an increasing demand for childcare and care for the elderly, and the lack of access to adequate publicly funded care services, women and girls are most commonly tasked with covering these absences. Although this creates jobs in the care economy, they

are mostly informal positions without benefits and protections, provide low or no-wages, and expose women and girls to physical, mental, and sometimes sexual harm. According to the ILO 2018 report, women perform 76 per cent of the total hours provided in unpaid care work, which prevents them from gaining education and formal employment. Therefore, these women and girls often have no or only partial access to social protection systems.

Working with Faith Actors to promote Universal Social Protection

As churches and faith-based organisations, we have historically been on the forefront of providing sustainable social services and support to those living in the socio-economic margins, even in areas where governments have difficulty in ensuring an institutional presence. Faith communities, institutions and leaders challenge corrupt and unfair practices by promoting women's participation at all levels of society, as well as their right to be covered under social protection systems. For example, Lutheran World Service India Trust sensitises both women and men to address gender discriminatory practices that prevail in the society, and to bring change in stereotyped gender roles and gender division of labour. Lutheran World Service India Trust facilitates meetings between local government authorities and citizens, primarily women living in poverty, where they disseminate information on their right to existing public food and social security schemes and how to access these benefits.

Achieving Social Protection through Taxation

We note with deep concern that inequalities have risen sharply in the past 25 years, leaving 1.2 billion people living in multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2018). In this period, the richest 1 per cent have gained more income than the bottom 50 per cent put together. It is our firm conviction that global leaders need to move away from the belief that economic growth alone will end poverty, and address state's accountability in tax collection and tax justice, and a fair distribution thereof as an imperative for financing social protection structures for all citizens, especially women and girls. Currently, 71 per cent of the global population are lacking coverage by comprehensive social protection systems (ILO, 2018).

As faith actors, we advocate for the responsibility of the state to guarantee social protection for all through taxation and other public revenues. Taxation is a fundamental instrument for redistribution of wealth and for financing social protection systems. Governments and the private sector should be transparent about the collection, payment, and use of taxes. Corporations and wealthy individuals have a particular responsibility to financing the common good so that all can have life in dignity, and should abstain from evading taxes, engaging in capital flight, or in illicit capital flows. It is the responsibility of the state to use taxation to provide social protection for all inhabitants, including women and girls.

For example, the Christian Council of Tanzania advocates for policy reforms so that the government will guarantee a percentage of revenues from extractive industries, value-added taxes, and 'sin' taxes on alcohol and gambling, to ensure that the poorest Tanzanians are covered by health insurance as a matter of social protection. Christian Council of Tanzania also mobilises local communities through economic self-help groups and enables them to join existing health insurance schemes.

Recommendations

Based on our experiences as faith-based networks and institutions, our recommendations to Member States are as follows:

- Implement the ILO Recommendation 202 on Social Protection Floors (2012) and provide basic income security and access to health care for all people, as a first step towards comprehensive and universal social protection systems.
- Ensure that systems of social protection are anchored in law and long-term political agreements and comply with international human rights standards and are designed in a way that minimises the risk of stigma, arbitrariness and corruption and that promotes transparency and access to legal recourse and complaints mechanisms at all levels.
- Prioritise spending for social protection floors in the budget, as an imperative of human rights.
- Engage with different actors in society in a political dialogue on social protection — including faith based-and other civil society actors — for the progressive realisation of comprehensive social protection systems, without compromising the duty of the state to fulfil all people's right to social protection.
- Mobilise resources for publicly funded social protection through progressive and fair taxation of the private sector and ensure maximum financial transparency to the public.
- Ensure accountability, efficiency and inclusivity in the delivery of social protection programmes.
- Guarantee gender-specific analysis and design of social protection systems beyond the narrow focus on maternity and overcoming the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, by prioritising the voice of women and girls in the designing social protection systems.
- Incorporate the international human rights instruments into the individual State Legislations to ensure equity and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups like women in the informal sector including enactment/review labour laws e.g. the minimum wage, paid parental leave.